

P 261649Z APR 01
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6162
ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 001018

PARIS FOR O'FRIEL, LONDON FOR SUTPHIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/06
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SUBJECT: KHATAMI HOLDS COURT FOR LEBANESE

REF: BEIRUT 1012 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE DAVID M. HALE. REASON 1.5 B&D

11. (C) SUMMARY: IRANIAN PRESIDENT KHATAMI MET ON APRIL 25 WITH HIZBALLAH SYG HASSAN NASRALLAH AND PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER/AMAL LEADER NABIH BERRI ON THE MARGINS OF THE TEHRAN-SPONSORED CONFERENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE AL-AQSA INTIFADA. KHATAMI LAVISHED PRAISE ON HIZBALLAH AND WAS SOMEWHAT MORE RESERVED WITH AMAL, THOUGH BERRI SCORED A VICTORY OF SORTS WITH THE RE-OPENING OF THE AMAL OFFICE IN TEHRAN. FIRMLY FIXED BEHIND HIZBALLAH IN FUNDING AND POPULARITY, INCREASED IRANIAN ATTENTION AND PLEDGES OF FUNDING FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOUTH ARE OPPORTUNITIES BERRI IS EAGER TO EXPLOIT. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) AS BLUSTERING RHETORIC CONTINUED TO EMANATE FROM THE CONFERENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE INTIFADA HELD IN TEHRAN, IRANIAN PRESIDENT KHATAMI HELD MEETINGS ON APRIL 25 WITH HIZBALLAH SYG HASSAN NASRALLAH AND SPEAKER/AMAL CHIEF, NABIH BERRI. LAUDING HIZBALLAH AS "THE SPARKLING AND SHINING JEWEL IN THE SKY OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD," KHATAMI HAILED THE PARTY AS A "MODEL" FOR RESISTING ISRAELI AGGRESSION AND OCCUPATION. PRAISING THE SACRIFICES HIZBALLAH, ITS MARTYRS, AND SUPPORTERS HAVE MADE THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THEIR RESISTANCE, KHATAMI CALLED ON THE PARTY TO CONTINUE SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIANS, "THE MAJOR CAUSE OF THE ISLAMIC UMMMA." POINTING TO THE GROUP'S "SUCCESS" IN FORCING ISRAEL TO WITHDRAW FROM SOUTH LEBANON, KHATAMI NOTED "AN ENEMY THAT WAS DEFEATED ONCE COULD BE DEFEATED AGAIN." IN RESPONSE, NASRALLAH STRESSED ARAB AND ISLAMIC UNITY WAS NEEDED TO CONFRONT THE "ANGERED ZIONIST ENTITY," AND TO ENSURE ADEQUATE MEANS TO SUPPORT THE INTIFADA AT DIFFERENT LEVELS.

13. (U) FOLLOWING ON THE HEELS OF NASRALLAH WAS BERRI. SOMEWHAT OUT OF PLACE AT A CONFERENCE CHAMPIONING THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE, BERRI NONETHELESS SEIZED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL ADVANCEMENT. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, HE THANKED KHATAMI FOR ALLOWING AMAL TO OPEN AN OFFICE IN TEHRAN; KHATAMI REPLIED "IRAN IS YOUR OFFICE." DOLING OUT AN OUNCE OF PRAISE FOR LEBANON'S "OTHER" SHIA PARTY, KHATAMI THANKED AMAL FOR ITS "STEADFASTNESS," AND BERRI FOR HIS "GOOD ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION," REMARKING "WE ALWAYS BENEFIT FROM MEETINGS WITH YOU." BERRI WILL NO DOUBT SEEK TO USE THIS MEETING TO ASSOCIATE HIMSELF WITH ANY INCREASED STATE-TO-STATE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM TEHRAN, AND WITH A PROPOSED KHATAMI VISIT TO LEBANON, IN HIS PERPETUAL POLITICAL STRUGGLE WITH HIZBALLAH.

HALE